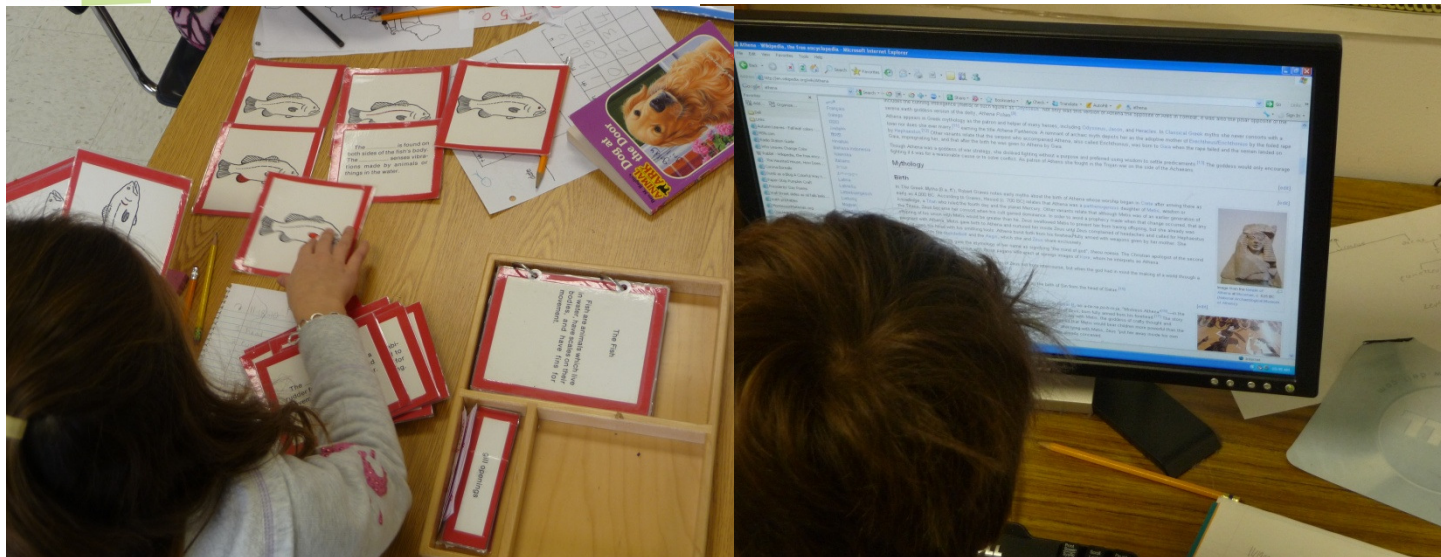




Montessori Matters



Reading occurs daily in our Elementary programs and includes vocabulary studies (left) and internet-based research (right). At any given moment, children also enjoy literature.

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On the Calendar

November

24-26 School Closed: Thanksgiving.

December

4 House Warming Party!

For additional calendar dates, go to www.rmschool.org

After School Studios

- 22 Discovering Chinese - Children's House 3:00-4:15
- 23 Science Club - E1 3:15-4:30

RMS

•Spanish Immersion, • Environmental Education, • Technology in Instruction, • the Arts, and • becoming an International Baccalaureate Middle School program. *Because how children learn influences who they will become.*

Learning to Read –2

By Paul Epstein, Ph.D., Ann Epstein, Ph.D.

Some people there are who, being grown, forget the horrible task of learning to read. It is perhaps the greatest single effort that the human undertakes, and he must do it as a child. - John Steinbeck, 1962 Nobel Prize Winner for Literature

There are many learning-to-read activities throughout the Montessori curriculum. These are grouped into categories called exposure to language, phonemic awareness, phonics development, phonological awareness, word identification, word study, comprehension, composition, and fluency. These components are not sequential; they overlap. The Montessori curriculum offers numerous learning activities for each one.

Exposure to Language Learning to read begins during the infant and toddler years when young children learn to understand spoken or signed language. They next speak or sign that language. Children cannot be over-exposed to language. Research consistently demonstrates that children learn to read more easily when they are read to often. Exposure to language continues during the elementary and secondary years. Exposure to new vocabulary, usage, and construction increases reading fluency.

With plenty of opportunities to express themselves in a Montessori environment, language is a valuable part of the child's day. Invitations to think around: Why do you suppose that happened? What do you think? Can you guess what will happen next? Will you tell me about your drawing? The child is given the space, time, and a ready audience, and is only too happy to respond. There are opportunities for the child to listen as well. Children hear their classmates, especially the older ones and adults, and learn to experiment with vocabulary.

Reading to Children

Before reading—

1. Talk about the topic and the concepts in the book .
2. Read the title, author, and illustrator. Use and explain these words too.
3. Ask the child to predict what the story is about on the bases of the title and cover.

While reading—

4. Read with interest and with animation.
5. Track the print with your hand or pointer.
6. Think aloud about your understanding of certain parts of the story; make predications and draw conclusions.
7. Hesitate at predictable parts in the text and allow the child to fill in words or phrases. This is especially effective with texts that repeat phrases or sentences.
8. Ask the child at appropriate parts in a story for her or his anticipation about what might happen next.

After reading—

9. Talk about key ideas in the story.
10. Ask the child to recall important or favorite parts. Re-read those parts.
11. Consider the illustrations and how they do (or don't) represent the text.
12. Talk about various punctuation marks, repeated words, and other patterns.

Phonemic Awareness Children learn to recognize which spoken sounds are meaningful. An infant's babbling noises gradually become comprehensible sounds. Toddlers connect sounds into words, then phrases, and finally lengthy conversations.

Phonics Development Learning to read requires associating basic sounds, and combinations of sounds, with letters. This process may require several years. Children in the Montessori toddler and primary programs experience many phonics activities. The Sandpaper Letters are a set of twenty-six large, individual letters cut from sandpaper and mounted on 5" x 7" high-gloss painted boards. The rough letters are traced as the teacher pronounces the sound of the letter. This marriage of verbal and tactile sensation helps the child associate the sound with the symbol. This work also helps imprint the shape of the letter in the child's mind and hand. Each letter is traced and pronounced; for example, the letter *c* is traced and pronounced *k*. In related lessons, objects that represent the phonetic sound are matched to the letter. A plastic *cat* is matched to the letter *c*. A plastic hat to the letter *h*.

Games are played with the letters where three consonants are shown. The teacher pronounces the sound, and the child finds the corresponding letter. Alternatively, a word is said, and the child finds the initial sound. And there are many more games. The aim is to make language fun.

When children have mastered the phonetic sounds of letters, they will work with a set of plastic letters called the *Moveable Alphabet* to write and read a series of phonetic words such as *cat, hat, mat, bat*. With this material, the child can see that by simply changing the first letter, *bat* becomes *cat*, which can then magically turn into *hat* and so on. After the initial sound is reliably identified in these very basic words, the child moves on to experiment with the final sound. When the consonants are mastered, the short vowels become the focus. Later, children will write and read their *Moveable Alphabet* compositions consisting of phrases or sentences. Given the complexities of English, parents must accept and encourage initial "invented spellings." Expression at this young age should trump accuracy which will come later. A child might use the plastic letters to write, *mitetrknreddezkn*. (My teacher can read this, can you?)

Phonological Awareness Readers learn how to group the sounds of a spoken language. For example, sentences are made up of words, words can be divided into syllables, and syllables can be divided into phonemes. Comprehending spoken intonation, alliteration, and rhymes are also necessary components for learning to read.

Children in our Montessori elementary program study phonograms and the rules for spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Grammar studies include identification of the parts of speech. Children are shown a set of brightly colored graphic symbols. A large triangle represents the noun; a red ball is the verb. In the elementary classroom, children discover and analyze how the use of the various parts of speech can add texture to an author's work and in turn improve their own writing as their understanding deepens.

Independent readers are able to read and follow the directions found on the printed classroom materials. Children also study sentence and paragraph structures.

Word Identification Children learn to understand written words through phonic analysis, structural analysis (root words, prefixes, and suffixes), context cues (the meaning of words as used), sight word recognition, configuration cues, and picture cues. A number of activities are available in classrooms for children to develop word identification skills.

Children explore sets of Object Boxes. Each box houses a number of small objects with cards, and the child reads and matches cards and objects. In another activity, children use Bingo cards to learn to read sight words. Each child has a card with 9-25 high-frequency sight words; children play in the traditional way in a small group. A third type of activity is called Three Part Cards. One card shows a picture with a



printed identifying label. The second card is just the picture, and the third card is the word itself. Primary age children match the pictures and then match the labels. Older children will match the picture to the label, and then check their own work with the card that has both a label and an illustration.

Word Study Children are always expanding their reading vocabulary and understanding of concepts. The primary and elementary classrooms are filled with cards that label an impressive array of geometric shapes, leaf forms, the parts of flowers, countries of the world, land and water forms, and much, much more. Montessori children are known for their incredible spoken and reading vocabularies as they identify an isosceles triangle, rectangular prism, the stamen of a flower, or the nations of Asia on a map.

Montessori elementary children use sets of cards organized into drawers to study nouns (common and proper, masculine and feminine), family groups, irregular plurals, articles and agreement, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, homophones, synonyms, capitalization, and abbreviations. Spelling programs are also found in the elementary classrooms. Children learn the basic rules through practice and dictation.

Comprehension Readers find and construct meaning in a text. They engage with ideas and develop a sense of the whole message. Children are asked, Who are the characters? What just happened? What do you think will happen next? Ask open-ended questions where there is no right or wrong answer. Ask the child to support her or his answer with the information from the text. Ask inference questions. Invite the child to compose an alternative ending or section.

Composition Young readers discuss literature and learn to understand how authors use descriptions, emotions, and opinions to present their messages.

Fluency Readers also learn to read a text accurately and quickly. Children explore different kinds of books – fiction and non-fiction, and within these categories mysteries, biographies, poetry, plays, instructions, directions, recipes, newspapers, internet articles, and magazine articles.

Amazingly, children do learn to read. They are guided and taught. They assemble these cognitive components as they proceed through several stages of learning to read.

Emergent Readers: Reading Aloud Initially, young children are read to. Reading aloud should occur often and with a variety of genres – fiction, history, science, poetry. Effective reading aloud gives young children adult models of fluent reading. Children develop a sense of story, vocabulary, and the ability to make predictions. Children can make connections to personal experiences, deepen their understandings, and develop active listening skills. Effective reading aloud methods include reading daily and asking the child questions before, during, and after the reading. The reader may stop to reread interesting passages, express delight over humorous



An independent reader in Kindergarten reads factual information about landforms found on each of the seven continents.

parts, and emphasize drama and suspense. New books are introduced by naming the author and illustrator and discussing the title. Read the title and ask the child, “What do you think will happen?” After reading, talk about what happened to the extent the child is interested and willing.

Another important reading tool at this age is songs. Learning how to *hear* rhyming words is an important developmental stage for reading. Children who can hear rhyming words can go to the next stage of reading/spelling that allows them to see and predict the pattern when only the first phoneme is changed; for example, *cat, sat, fat, mat* and *rat*.

Shared Reading In this next stage, the adult and child take turns reading. Shared Reading helps the emergent reader to develop reading strategies, such as fluency and phrasing, and increases comprehension. The book could be read over several days to build enjoyment of the text. The book could be read again. A second reading builds and extends comprehension. A third reading focuses on interesting language and helps the child increase her/his reading vocabulary.

To begin, invite the emergent reader to read the words they know. Progress to taking turns reading pages. Later, in first chapter books like “Frog and Toad,” take turns reading chapters. Other activities can include playing games. Encourage the child to point to all the words that start with a specific sound. Talk about what’s going on in the picture and how it relates to the story. Invite the child to dictate a book to you.

Independent Reading Children read independently to enjoy and to learn. Independent readers develop strategies for decoding and comprehending more challenging texts.

Children at this stage of reading are excited about their new discovery. It’s important to encourage this by reading

with your child, and by providing appropriate books. This means doing your homework. Ask your child's teacher, librarian, or a bookseller for suggestions for beginning or novice readers, and then read the books yourself before offering them to your child. The vast selection of books at your local library or bookstore can be overwhelming. Rather than taking your child to the library or bookstore, go ahead of time by yourself and select 3 to 6 books to bring home to the child. This way you know the content, the reading level and the type size. Keep your child's interests and reading ability in mind as you make your selection. At this point in your child's reading life, choose books that are within your child's reading ability. You want to encourage your child with success and fun. Your child will go through these early readers quickly. If you purchased the books, release them when she has lost interest. Allow your child the opportunity to experience the joy of giving—let her donate the books to her school or local library.

Guided Reading Once children have become independent readers, they may engage in group reading. A Literature Circle is one example of guided reading. During Literature Circle, a small group of children talk about a text they all read. They discuss characterization, story settings, the summary of a plot, and the many ways the events in a story can relate to their personal lives. They learn that there may not be one understanding, and that different readers have different interpretations and experiences of what was read.

People of all ages love to discuss books. Share the joy with your child by reading the books your child is reading. It will draw you closer together and keep you in touch with what is important to your child—no matter what age. Ask your child questions about what he/she is reading. *Can you believe _____ happened? What do you think will happen next? What would you do?* This type of discussion happens in the classroom. Children share ideas and talk about books. In addition, students may choose creative ways to share their interpretation of a story. They may write about what they have read or perhaps an alternate ending, draw pictures, or respond to the story by making up a play about the story or by making a model. The student is encouraged to interact with the story in a way that is meaningful to him/her.

Learning to read involves cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth. In other words, children will only read when they are ready despite the desires and aspirations of teachers and parents. Learning to read is also dependent upon experiences with spoken language. Children must actively converse and not passively watch and hear language on TV, DVDs, or other media. Children learn to place words in their correct order, use correct meanings, and increase their vocabulary through conversation.

Appropriate early literacy activities introduce Montessori

Key Components of Balanced Literacy in the Montessori Reading Program

- √ Various reading experiences occur: shared, interactive, guided, independent.
- √ Various reading levels are present: emergent, early developing, fluent.
- √ Appropriate types of reading materials (at the child's reading level) are available.
- √ Reading Aloud is a critical part of every age and every classroom; strategies include:
 - Ask predictive questions.
 - Include children's background experiences.
 - Engage children's prior knowledge to encourage interaction with stories and books.
 - Review vocabulary and provide definitions of new vocabulary.
 - Pair emerging readers with readers.
 - Use visual aids to deepen the child's understanding of stories.
- √ Expose children to a variety of literature types:
 - Poetry.
 - Fiction and non-fiction.
 - Plays.
- √ Shared Reading takes place, for example, during Literature Circles.
 - Children develop their own voices as readers.
 - Comprehension is assessed.
- √ Peer mentoring occurs when older children read to younger children.
- √ Children create personal dictionaries of their favorite words.
- √ Children develop phonological awareness: structure of words, sentences, paragraphs.
- √ Reading progress is assessed including
 - Running records of children's reading.
 - Records of children's ability to decode and to comprehend.

children to the building blocks of reading. Later elementary experiences propel children into the joy of developing a favorite book. Thus, Montessori children are well on their way to becoming lifelong thoughtful, creative, and informed readers.

